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ADDRESS OF POSTMASTER-GENERAL CORTELYOU
AT THE ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE LINCOLN
REPUBLICAN CLUB AND THE YOUNG MEN'S
REPUBLICAN CLUB, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN,
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1906



LINCOLN'S INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN LIFE

Lincoln

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LINCOLN'S INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN LIFE.

MR. TOASTMASTER, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

You could do me no greater honor than to refer to my association with one, the beauty and dignity and simplicity of whose life were as a benediction to our people. It is appropriate that we should pay tribute to his memory upon this anniversary of the birth of his great predecessor. They had much in common. Each sprang from the people, and each gave to the people the last "full measure of devotion." Beloved by his countrymen everywhere, no commonwealth in the Union gave larger evidence of faith in him than the State of Michigan, and your faith was never misplaced. You and those who come after you will find in our annals no purer patriot, no finer gentleman, than William McKinley.

I have pleasure in expressing the deep interest in this celebration and in conveying to you the best wishes of the President of the United States. And I say to you in his direct and hearty words, "Good luck to the people of Grand Rapids."

We have with us to-night, the representatives of sister Republics to the south of us, the distinguished Ambassador of Brazil, and his colleagues in the diplomatic corps, the Minister of Nicaragua, the Minister of Chile, and my old school-mate and friend the Minister of Cuba. They reciprocate our kindly interest in the welfare of their countries

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and their good will for us is equalled by our good will for them. In friendly rivalry, but as the years go by drawn closer and closer in the bonds of mutual confidence and good fellowship, we march shoulder to shoulder with them as the people of the two Americas move on to the heights of their manifest destinies.

It has been a privilege to come here in the good care of my friend of many years, your honored Representative in Congress—William Alden Smith. We know now what you knew when you sent him to Washington, and we congratulate you on your good judgment. In the National House of Representatives he has at heart not only the interests of his district but of the country at large, and he is therefore influential, and deservedly so, in its affairs.

I am glad to be in the State of Michigan, and it is a special pleasure to have the opportunity of speaking in this busy and thriving city.

The presence of the Fremont voters whom I see here this evening is an inspiring feature of this great meeting. You will, I am sure, indulge me also when I say that I have been greatly interested in learning that nearly a third of the population of this city are of good old Dutch stock.

Michigan is the birthplace of the Republican party. On the 6th of July, 1904, under the oaks at Jackson, the fiftieth anniversary of its birth was celebrated. The Vice-President of the United States (then a Senator from Indiana) was present, and John Hay, diplomat, scholar, and statesman, delivered the oration—one of his last notable public addresses.

The Republican party was born of the quickened conscience of the American people and among its most forceful,

influential and inspired leaders was Zachariah Chandler, of whom Senator Hoar in his political history says, there was never a cabinet minister who approached him in the administration of the Interior Department. For nearly a generation he was an overshadowing personality in the United States Senate, and a dominant factor in the affairs of your commonwealth.

Michigan has always been true to the principles advocated by Lincoln and his successors; while this auditorium has resounded with the eloquence of Fremont and Blaine and Garfield and McKinley and Roosevelt. I am told that McKinley in the midst of the most bitterly contested political campaign in which he was the central figure, left his old Congressional district and came here to render loyal and unselfish service to his friends.

He was especially interested in this city. Its push and its enterprise appealed to him, and the welfare of its workers was always a matter of his deep concern. The employees of your great manufacturing establishments bring intelligence and ambition to their tasks, and the results contribute much to make comfortable and attractive the homes of the world. You fix the standard in certain lines of trade upon the products of which you can, with no impropriety, place as the inscription of sterling worth—"Made in Grand Rapids."

Every day in the life of an American should be a day dedicated to patriotism, but we have properly set apart by legislative enactment, and in accordance with the dictates of our hearts, special anniversaries on which we recall the deeds of the mighty dead whose names stand out in letters of living light upon the pages of our country's history. Such an anniversary is this of the 12th of February.

The life we honor to-night is that of one of the most illustrious of Americans. In the calendar of liberty none gives us greater inspiration—Lincoln the rail-splitter, Lincoln the advocate, Lincoln the legislator, Lincoln the President, Lincoln the Emancipator, Lincoln of the Ages!

The history of that wonderful career is in millions of our homes. It is studied in our schools. It is known of all nations. Few have approached it in moral grandeur. In the passing of the years, his fame will grow as the aspirations for liberty broaden within our own boundaries and reach far across the seas.

I shall not attempt to recite in detail the story of his life, his humble origin, his early struggles, his meagre facilities for study, the eagerness with which he availed himself of every educational influence within his reach, his honesty, his intuitive perception of the justice of a cause, the homeliness of his speech and the directness of his methods, his political sagacity and his knowledge of human nature, his belief in the people and his reliance upon them, his steady growth in their confidence until he reached the high office with whose glorious traditions his name will be forever associated. How human he was! How tender he was! How charitable toward the afflicted and the erring! With all his gentleness, how strong, and how completely he met the supreme tests that came to him in the Presidency! What an illustration his life afforded of the truths that early privations need be no bar to ultimate success; that obstacles overcome are the greatest of educators; that integrity and honor and fair dealing are living factors in every real triumph, in every abiding fame; that faith in the people and devotion to their interests are essentials to lasting honor in public life.

For the greater part of the past three-quarters of a century, Lincoln's influence on American life has been felt in ever-increasing measure. It was reflected in his contemporaries, and those who have followed him in the Presidency make no concealment of their obligation to him. During the weary and anxious months of the dread conflict in which he became the transcendent figure, his mighty spirit unfolded in all its greatness and simplicity. Those who at first scoffed came to respect profoundly, then to love him.

Through all this land and in many a foreign clime there is to-day this feeling of personal affection for him and devotion to his memory.

Upon the recurring anniversaries of his birth, we are coming more and more to apply to existing needs the teachings of his life, his ideals, his achievements. There can be no more appropriate tribute to his memory.

In any discussion of our national problems, we cannot too often revert to the words with which he closed his immortal speech at Gettysburg, for in "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people" rests our salvation. Dangers beset us on every hand when we stray away from that ideal.

I speak to-night with that ideal in mind and I shall touch upon a few subjects that seem to me especially worthy of our attention.

It is customary to say that we are now in a period of transition, and in this instance to say what is customary is to say what is true. Old theories and old methods are passing away. From lean years we have come to years of plenty. Prosperity greets us upon every hand. Profitable employment awaits every man who honestly seeks work. The rewards

of toil and study and preparation were never so great, and never were opportunities larger for those who give to the State or to the nation their loyal service. Everywhere throughout the land the great arteries of trade throb with new life. Business operations that but a short time ago were conducted upon restricted lines, have developed into gigantic undertakings. We have great organizations of capital and great organizations of labor. American spirit and American enterprise are blazing the pathway of civilization.

But as a recent writer has aptly said:

“The commerce and manufacturing of the world is in its infancy. Things now considered gigantic are child’s play to what this age of industry and science will evolve. The home market will be one of continued demand. The cities throughout the United States will be rebuilt; two-thirds of the area of this country awaits development. The spirit of enterprise is taking hold of the farmers. Farm houses will be rebuilt, remodeled, and modernized. Streets throughout the country will be paved and roads improved.

“As to exports, the whole world is now the field for American genius. The Old World, with its millions of people, is to be copper-wired, trollied, railed, and implemented; even the most remote districts are to advance to power of exchange. In everything that pertains to the manufacture of goods that promote civilization, the American excels, and besides, he not alone supplies markets, but studies how to create them.”

The new era with its expansion of territory and expansion of commerce has brought its perplexities and its problems. They are many and serious, but as we study them, however

much we may disagree as to details of policy, there can be no difference of opinion upon certain of them that are vital to our national welfare. Government must be honest, business dealings must square with the principles of right and justice, the things that are true and clean and of good repute must be exalted; and underlying the whole fabric of our institutions we must safeguard our schools and keep pure and undefiled, as the very foundation of our liberties, the American home. Every flippant comment upon its problems, every improper invasion of its privacy, strikes at our national life.

We must approach every public question with a determination to be fair and just in its discussion. Reforms to be practical must be reasonable. They must begin among the people whose safeguard is the ballot through which every offender can be ultimately reached.

There is no warrant for wholesale denunciation of officials. The people must not forget that they are themselves largely responsible if improper men reach positions in the public service. Too frequently the sternest critic is the one who gives the least attention to his civic duties. In the main, government is honestly administered. It is the legislator that is usually the legitimate subject of criticism, not the legislature; and the judiciary, weak as it may be in some instances, has but its proportion of the unworthy.

The founders of the republic builded wisely when they created as co-ordinate branches of government the legislative, the executive, and the judicial. They have stood the test of the years. But we need a stricter adherence to the boundaries between them so that one shall not encroach upon another.

It is quite popular at the moment to deprecate the accumulation of wealth and hold up to suspicion the organizers of great enterprises, and unfortunately there has been much occasion for criticism. There are too many who care for how much they have rather than how well they can use it; who fail to realize that "great possessions are a royal trust from God to be employed for the benefit of mankind."

But many of the leaders in the business world to-day, merchant princes in our cities and organizers of industry, are among the finest types of American life, just as in the organizations of labor, sturdy and patriotic men have achieved a deserved prominence.

We demand publicity, and properly, in regard to certain matters affecting interstate interests, and the several States must have wholesome requirements as to the conduct of business within their borders. This is the will of the people, and it is right, but because there are men prominent in the business world who are forgetful of the privileges granted them, and of their relations to their fellows, there is no occasion for indiscriminate condemnation, nor is there excuse for sensationalism in any form.

In many instances we have presented to us the anomaly of doing harm by our methods of doing good. There is too much of the spirit of propaganda abroad. We find it difficult at times to learn the real sentiment of the people. There must be a clearing away of these superficial movements. What we want to know is the genuine sentiment, ascertained after careful thought and investigation, and then it is our duty to carry out the people's will. Steady insistence upon clean living and good government will in the end meet an overwhelming response.

This is a government of parties, and platforms and policies are essentials to party organization. No party will succeed that is not thoroughly organized, and when we have organization, we must have leaders—leaders, mark you, not bosses. The day of the boss in American politics is on the wane. To put it in homely phrase, the time has come when the American people intend to be their own bosses.

I believe in rewarding party service and of opening the door of opportunity to every worthy aspirant for public station; but over its portals I would place the inscription, "Merit first, politics afterwards." No city government can be honestly and efficiently administered that reverses that order, and in the larger field of national service the same holds true in even greater degree.

Our political campaigns must be conducted upon the high plane of principle, in which the fullest discussion of policies shall be encouraged, but in which misrepresentation and abuse shall have no part. There has been much improvement in political methods and it should be our constant effort to free them from every feature that is inconsistent with good government.

Hateful as the domination of the boss has become, there is a tyranny that is worse than that of any boss—the tyranny of an irresponsible clamor, to which weak men bow and public officials at times yield their conscience and their judgment. Nothing strikes a deadlier blow at liberty than the insidious appeals made in her name in times of public excitement. Every convicted violator of her immutable principles should be scourged to his just punishment; but half a case is no case in her tribunals. Reputations that for long years have had the only basis that is enduring—charac-

ter—as their strength and bulwark, may be attacked and, for a time, sullied, but in the end our liberty-loving and fair-fighting people will consider the evidence and render their verdict, and they will turn and rend those who, seeking fame or fortune at any cost, have temporarily deceived them. I apply these sentiments to no particular incident or circumstance, but utter them rather as a protest against a tendency of the present. And it was a righteous judgment that found expression in recent comment upon this tendency, that “the means that man takes to kill another’s character often becomes suicide of his own.” No man should be condemned upon insinuation. No man should be held guilty until his case is all in. Fair play must not become obsolete as an American trait. When we demand honest dealing with the people we need not resort to the vilification of the blackguard in making our appeal.

There must be liberty of the press everywhere and always. Its comment and criticism hold us to a strict accountability, and should be welcomed by every honest official. But this liberty affords no warrant for hasty generalizations or unworthy attacks upon interests or individuals. Cases before the courts must be tried there and not in the newspapers. The noble mission of the press must be realized. Every newspaper must be fit for the American home, where purity dwells and honor is sacred.

Benjamin Franklin never said a wiser thing than when he uttered the words:

“It has long been the opinion of sober, judicious people, that nothing is more likely to endanger the liberty of the press than the abuse of that liberty by employing it in personal accusation, detraction, and calumny.”

Of late years there has developed a style of journalism, happily as yet limited in its scope, whose teachings are a curse and whose influence is a blight upon the land. Pandering to unholy passions, making the commonplace to appear sensational, fanning the fires of sectionalism and class hatred, invading the privacy of our firesides, it presents one of the most important of our present-day problems. But just as in the world of business, just as in the field of state and national administration, the shortcomings of a few must not be taken as representative of the many, so these journals of malign influence must not be regarded as fit examples of American journalism. The representative newspapers are true to its best traditions. While they print all the news, they yet make accuracy of statement and conservatism of editorial discussion characteristics of their management. And many of our weekly and monthly magazines are rendering incalculable service to the cause of good citizenship.

From foreign shores there come to us each year a million immigrants. We welcome the good, we should reject the bad. America is the land of liberty, but not liberty to undermine our institutions. In all this vast number there is one class that above all others must find no foothold here. While this is a big country, it is not now, and may it never be, big enough knowingly to admit into the ranks of its citizenship any avowed disorganizer of government or any avowed scoffer at our republican institutions. But our hands are outstretched to those who come to us with worthy purpose. Here in the great northwest you have some of the best blood of the old world—men and women who have come to us to live and to die under the starry banner of freedom.

I cannot but feel that it is a healthful and significant tendency of American life and a tribute to the stability of our institutions, that in these prosperous years when we might become careless and forgetful, there has been an awakening of the public conscience to our needs and dangers. But great as they are, there is no occasion for pessimism. The faith that sustained the fathers is the faith that sustains us: faith in the people, faith in their capacity for self-government. However severe the trials, however dark the outlook, the faith that inspired Lincoln is a living force to-day. He saw in the past an earnest of the future. In the noble sentiment of his first annual address to Congress:

“The struggle of to-day is not altogether for to-day, it is for a vast future also. With a reliance on Providence all the more firm and earnest let us proceed in the great task which events have devolved upon us.”

It is the spirit that breathed through the eloquent words of McKinley:

“Always perils, and always after them safety; always darkness and clouds, but always shining through them the light and the sunshine; always cost and sacrifice, but always after them the fruition of liberty, education, and civilization.”

It was the inspiration of John Hay’s noble oration at Jackson:

“How infinitely brighter the future when the present is so sure, the past so glorious. * * * Our path will ever remain that of ordered progress, of liberty under the law. * * * We are not daunted by progress; we are not afraid of the light.

The fabric our fathers builded on such sure foundations will stand all the shocks of fate or fortune.

* * * We who are passing off the stage bid you, as the Children of Israel were bidden, to Go Forward; we whose hands can no longer hold the flaming torch, pass it on to you that its clear light may show the truth to ages that are to come."

From these leaders who died in that faith we turn to its living embodiment—Theodore Roosevelt.

He cherishes the same traditions, he is actuated by the same high ideals. He is fighting, as they fought, the battles of good citizenship. By every consideration of loyalty, by recognition of purity of life, of singleness of purpose, of splendid grasp of the great questions of statesmanship, he is entitled to our unwavering and enthusiastic support. Not for any class or section or race or creed, he is the President of all the people. And we follow where he leads. Listen to his inspiring prophecy for the future:

"Succeed? Of course we shall succeed! How can success fail to come to a race of masterful energy and resoluteness which has a continent for the base of its domain and which feels within its veins the thrill that comes to generous souls when their strength stirs in them and they know that the future is theirs? No great destiny ever yet came to a nation whose people were laggards or faint-hearted. No great destiny ever yet came to a people walking with their eyes on the ground and their faces shrouded in gloom. No great destiny ever yet came to a people who feared the future, who feared failure more than they hoped for success. With such as these we have no part.

"We know there are dangers ahead, as we know there are evils to fight and overcome, but we feel to

the full the pulse of the prosperity which we enjoy. Stout of heart, we see across the dangers the great future that lies beyond, and we rejoice as a giant refreshed, as a strong man girt for the race; and we go down into the arena where the nations strive for mastery, our hearts lifted with the faith that to us and to our children and our children's children, it shall be given to make this Republic the mightiest among the peoples of mankind."

And now, gentlemen, let me say just one word to you as members of the Lincoln *Republican* Club and of the Young Men's *Republican* Club. For over half a century the Republican party has pursued its beneficent career, and during all that period its principles and its policies have been among the greatest factors in our moral and material development. The spirit of its leaders who have passed away animates the great organization they loved and served. And those who follow them are pledged to carry forward the standard they bore so worthily. Republicanism is ever aggressive. There are no faltering notes in its battle cries. They ring true on the great underlying doctrines of free government. The party of Lincoln and Grant and Garfield and Arthur, of Hayes and Harrison and McKinley and Roosevelt! What a heritage! What an inspiration for the future! If we are true to their principles we shall stand for clean policies and clean politics. We shall point to the record of an unexampled prosperity. But better a thousand times than this, we shall continue to advocate those theories of government which teach that material prosperity is but a poor and empty thing if accomplished through any sacrifice of the moral sense of our people.

As a nation we must press forward unwaveringly toward the goal of wholesome living, both public and private, waging never-ceasing warfare upon corruption in all its forms, insisting upon obedience to law from the highest to the humblest. But in dealing with the questions that confront us we must strive more and more to attain that condition of national calmness, not of inertness or indecision, but of conscious strength that is in keeping with the glory and honor and dignity of a people who are the heirs of liberty and to whom the world looks for the realization of her priceless privileges.

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